

## Jason and the Argonauts

1963. Morningside/Columbia. D: Don Chaffey. Scr: Jan Read, Beverley Cross. Ph: Wilkie Cooper. Art: Geoffrey Drake. Mus: Bernard Herrmann. Associate Producer and Creator of Special Visual Effects: Ray Harryhausen. Model Sculpture (uncredited): Arthur Hayward.

Cast: Todd Armstrong, Nancy Kovack, Gary Raymond, Laurence Naismith, Niall MacGinnis, Michael Gwynn, Douglas Wilmer, Jack Gwillim, Honor Blackman, Patrick Troughton, Nigel Green, Andrew Faulds.

Rating: ☆☆☆ Stop-Motion: ☆☆☆☆

*Jason* is Harryhausen's best-known work and his own favorite among his films. Even the most cynical of audiences respond to the grandeur of the episode with Talos, the giant bronze statue that comes to life, and to the bizarre thrills of the battle with the seven sword-wielding skeletons.

Don Chaffey's efficient direction of the live-action passages makes it hard to believe he is the same director who was later responsible for the lifeless *One Million Years B.C.* (1966). The script by Jan Read and Beverley Cross enthusiastically conjures up a credible version of ancient Greece, with an essentially simple plot sparked by a variety of colorful characters and good dialogue. The credit for this must go more to Read than Cross. Read co-wrote the excellent script for Harryhausen's next picture, *First Men in the Moon*, whereas Cross was later responsible for the unimaginative treatments for *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger*, *Clash of the Titans* and the unfiled *Force of the Trojans*. Cameraman Wilkie

Cooper really makes the most of the picturesque, rocky Italian locations, giving a vivid freshness to the outdoor scenes. Bernard Herrmann's magnificent score catches the right combination of the epic and the grotesque. It is at its most memorable during the skeleton battle where his ominous woodwind themes lead into high-speed staccato rhythms accompanying the fight itself.

It is more than half an hour before the first animation sequence but Chaffey insures that we do not get restless. These opening passages — Hermes' prophecy to Pelias, the storming of the temple, Jason rescuing the drowning Pelias, Jason's visit to the gods in Olympus and the selection of the Argonauts — still entertain after repeated viewing and have a liveliness and sense of grandeur missing from many much more lavish Hollywood epics.

They include a number of minor Harryhausen effects, all carried off flawlessly. Hera (Honor Blackman) appears as a cloud of smoke beside the river, with what looks like a miniature shrub placed in front of her to merge the composite. Hermes grows to a great height in front of Jason and disappears. Jason converses with the huge Olympians, merely a pawn-sized figure on a chessboard (depicted by means of excellent traveling mattes). Olympus is a fine miniature, matted around a central area in which the actors perform in long shots. And the disc thrown by Hercules and Hylas are stop-motion models shot against a rear projection — although just how Harryhausen got the water to splash is a

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In this publicity shot from *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), parts of the feet of the giant Talos disappear beneath the matte line. No such flaw occurs in shots actually seen in the film.

mystery. (It may be a superimposed third element.)

Chaffey, Read and Cross maintain this level of enthusiasm throughout the Talos episode, but thereafter the film starts to degenerate into little more than a series of effects set-pieces, and the film's sense of purpose is lost. In fact, the end of the film is quite unsatisfactory (and unclassical) because the conflict with King Pelias, whom Jason is prophesied to overthrow, is completely ignored. The story ends abruptly after Jason has seized the Golden Fleece while

Zeus announces from above, "We have not yet finished with Jason." It's a shame that the scripting excellence was not sustained to the end.

The encounter with Talos on the Isle of Bronze is a magnificent conception and makes good use of its beach and cliff locations. It is marred only by the inconsistent scale of the huge statue—too large when it picks the ship out of the water and too small when Jason struggles to loosen the plug in its heel. Otherwise this is a classic Harryhausen episode consisting of a series of unfor-

gettable images and a novel conclusion. Talos, with his stiff, metallic movements and black, soulless eyes, is one of the screen's great bogey men. No man in a costume could have evoked the same presence.

Hercules (Nigel Green) and Hylas (John Cairney) stumble on the awesome Valley of Statues — the tiny actors walk across the bottom of an extreme long shot with four huge statues seamlessly matted into the landscape. Inside the base of Talos' statue they find a horde of treasure. A long shot of the interior uses a matte painting dripping with jewels. Outside again, Hercules hears an ominous creak of metal and looks up to see Talos' head turn towards him. This classic low-angle shot, with Hercules' head inserted in the lower right hand corner by means of traveling matte, is a genuinely haunting nightmare image. Brosnan (in *Movie Magic*) calls it "one of the great moments of cinema."

Six cuts show the great statue clambering off its pedestal and, in a deft touch, leaning back stiffly as though adjusting to its sudden consciousness. Three static-matte long shots show Talos emerging from behind a cliff, the sailors running about in the lower foreground. In one of these, Harryhausen has his creation swap his sword from one hand to the other, giving it an extra bit of vitality. In three more cuts, Talos stoops and his huge hand appears through a hole in the rocks, trying to reach the scattering sailors. Harryhausen adds an important touch to this static-matte set-up by superimposing a cloud of dust, thrown into the air when the statue drags his hand back again. When Talos gets up he walks past the hole in the cliff, a credi-

bly intricate matte which allows us to see his legs through the hole.

Varying the perspective to heighten the drama, Harryhausen cuts from an imposing low-angle shot looking up at the statue to a shot looking over Talos' shoulder at the Argonauts fleeing in their boat. When Talos turns and walks away, there is a slight jiggle in the lower half of the matte where the registration has not been held steady.

In a long sequence, Talos cuts off the sailors' escape route, stepping over the exit from the harbor and destroying their ship. He pivots stiffly, planting one foot on the other side of the channel (which may well have been put there by matte photography if it is not an actual location). Several very good traveling mattes allow the camera to look up at Talos from the sailors' point of view as the boat nearly drifts through his legs. Medium shots of Talos looking down at the Argonauts are intercut with several long shots of the tiny boat sailing below.

He swaps his sword hand again, stoops and picks up the boat, with Harryhausen effectively cutting between live-action shots of the actors being thrown about, a prop of the boat shaken from side to side in the air, and stop-motion long shots of Talos holding a miniature of the boat, tiny animated oars and the broken mast falling into the sea — probably suspended on wires for a few frames. After dropping the boat, Talos turns and walks away.

There is a pause in the action as the sailors swim to shore, then Talos reappears. A dramatic camera move pans from Jason and his men to the sight of Talos striding past some far-off rocks — it looks as though Harryhausen has

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moved his animation camera in closer and simply panned across the pre-shot background plate. After three cuts of Talos behind these rocks, a fourth has him step around the same rocks, cleverly helping to disguise the composite: The matte which initially follows the top of the rocks is replaced by a horizontal one along the beach.

A number of non-matte medium shots of the puppet (most dramatically a shot which tilts up from his waist to his head, and an impressive full-view low-angle view) are intercut with long shots of the Argonauts throwing rocks and spears. Talos swipes at them with his huge sword, which nearly fills the frame in one rear-screen shot as it swishes past the sailors. His enormous foot swings past Jason, who is waiting for an opportunity to get at the statue's weak spot, its heel. After a low-angle view looking up at Talos' back, Jason runs over to the heel. In some shots, a non-animated prop of the foot is used, matted onto the beach; closer shots, in which Jason actually releases the plug at the back of the heel, employ a full-scale prop. Several medium shots show Talos looking down with concern.

Steam and ichor, the statue's life-blood, escape from Talos' heel. Although it looks like a live-action fluid, the ichor was actually strips of cellophane that were turned on a wheel frame by frame to simulate a falling liquid; it is a totally convincing effect. Talos drops his sword, growls and clutches his throat as though suffocating — a characteristic moment of Harryhausen pathos. The puppet is motionless for a few seconds as Harryhausen adds a series of cracks to it, then it topples over, straight at the camera. A

partial miniature floor is skillfully matted into the beach setting in the shot where Talos hits the ground, allowing the puppet to throw a shadow. The head and limbs are realistically animated as they break away. The satisfying narrative twist here is that Hylas is crushed under the statue as he tries to retrieve the very spear which Hercules had stolen from the treasure trove — the act which had incited Talos' revenge in the first place.

The conclusion to the Talos episode is one of many sequences in a Harryhausen film that reveals the identity of films that had a profound effect on him when he was young. In *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935), with special effects by Willis O'Brien, the Colossus, a huge, helmeted, sword-bearing statue, cracks and collapses during the climactic volcanic eruption, falling on top of a fleeing extra.

The harpies episode is as bizarre a vignette as you could wish for and Harryhausen adds touches of grim humor to the antics of these pesky creatures which contrast neatly with the grandeur of the Talos encounter. The temple ruins provide another attractive location. Patrick Troughton gives a whole-hearted performance as the tormented blind hermit Phineas. Herrmann's light and quirky score adds its own bit of magic.

However, this is not a great animation scene. The first section, which takes place in daylight, suffers from graininess in the background plate and a poorly matched floor inlay. The two puppets are nightmarish creatures but have to be shot almost entirely in long shot because they are facially lifeless and would not stand up to closer scrutiny. And Harry-



Harryhausen's harpies torment Phineas the blind man (Patrick Troughton) in *Jason and the Argonauts*.

hausen has problems with the strobing of the wings in some shots, which is distracting. But these are complaints which only arise after repeated viewings: The first time around, the scene has enough shock impact to obscure the faults.

Many of the armature components of the harpies came from *Mysterious Island's* phororhacos, which was stripped down and dismantled.

In the first animation cut, one of the noisily flapping harpies lands on a stone pedestal. A second harpy lands on the side of a ruined column (in three

cuts). The creatures attack Phineas and there is lots of implied interaction in two long cuts as they teasingly snatch at him with their feet. One of them grabs his walking stick, a flawless effect in which the stick is pulled away by invisible wires. A floor inlay around a miniature of a stone table is poorly matched but does allow the puppets to throw shadows, an important ingredient in any composite. When one of the harpies pushes the table over, Harryhausen animates the dishes sliding to the edge but cuts away before the fruit actually falls to

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the ground, so as to avoid time-consuming wire-supported animation of miniature props.

One harpy unwinds a strip of cloth from Phineas' clothing — an effect again using an invisible wire and careful alignment of puppet and actor. It's an utterly convincing effect and one of the classic moments of interaction in Harryhausen's career. He adds an amusing bit of characterization to a shot of the two puppets on the ground, munching noisily on the fruit. In this cut, they hold their wings out behind them, making very smooth movements. When the Argonauts arrive on the scene, the harpies fly off, seen in a very good rear-screen composite way off in the distance. The harpies are so small in this shot that Harryhausen may have used two smaller models.

The second part of the harpies episode takes place at night and is even better than the first. The nighttime setting makes it more eerie and helps to mesh the composites — the harpies really look like they are in among the live-action footage. And there is the visually striking idea of a huge net dropped from the top of the ruins and a final comic role-reversal where the two harpies are held in a cage and forced to eat scraps thrown to them by Phineas.

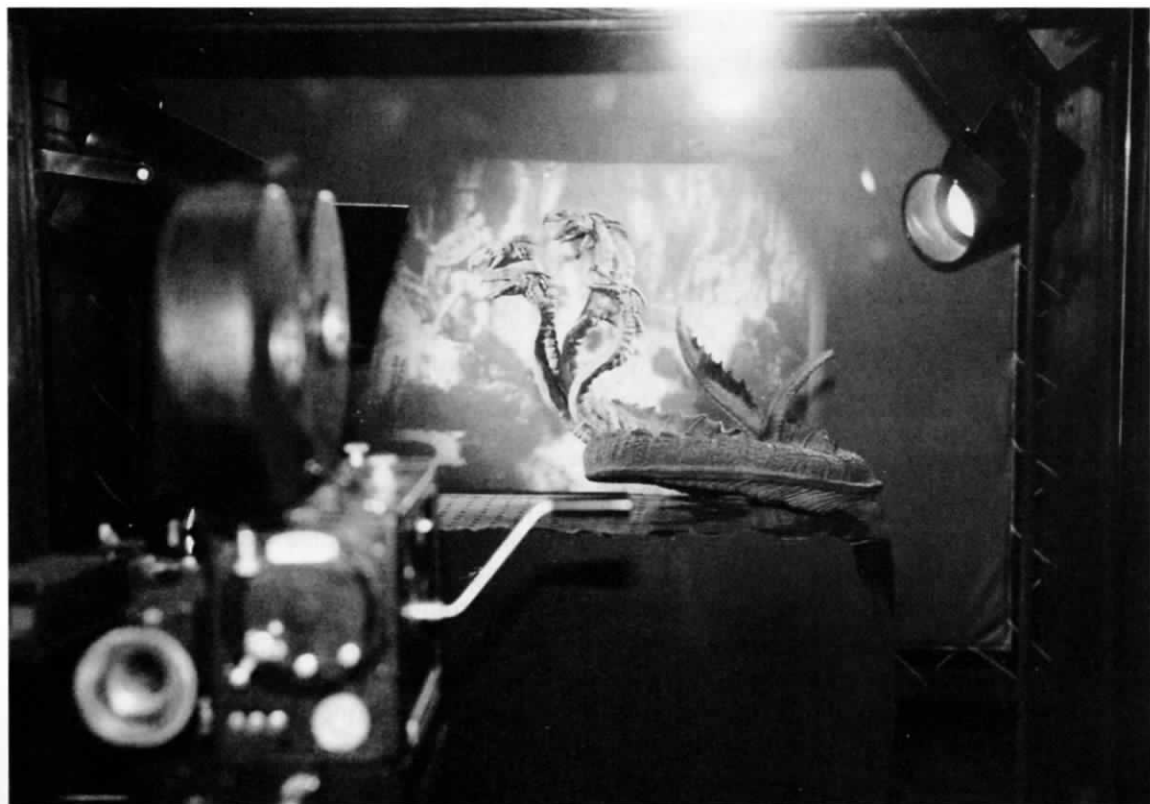
The sequence opens with an attractive shot of the two harpies landing where the food table used to be and looking around for it. A terrific composite — quite chilling as well — shows them crawling up some stone steps into the temple. Miniature steps are seamlessly matted in among the real ones. Seen from inside the temple, the creatures emerge from behind one of the

columns (providing a natural matte line) and take to the air.

An impressive long shot shows them flying behind two columns towards Phineas — the matte follows the outline of both columns. After a closer shot of the harpies harassing Phineas, the soldiers run into the temple and in a series of nine cuts wave their spears at the creatures flapping just out of reach. There are two low-angle shots of the harpies looking up at the net stretched over them. After the net is dropped, there are two fine shots, making a complex bit of animation look easy, with the harpies struggling underneath the net, their wings crumpling as they slowly fall to the ground. On the ground, they are surrounded by the Argonauts. This excellent composite really looks like one piece of film.

Later there are five cuts of the harpies in the cage. Three of them are static mattes with the Argonauts standing on the left. The other two are medium shots of the models behind the wooden bars (the closest we get to a good look at them). In one of them, a harpy catches some food tossed to it by Phineas. This closing moment catches the right tone of grim humor, and it makes a welcome change to have the creatures spared the normally obligatory death scene.

The live-action scene in which the sea god Triton saves Jason's ship from the Clashing Rocks is dramatically as effective as any of the animation scenes. But Harryhausen has problems with the beading of water droplets (which reveal the size of the studio tank) and a miniature mock-up of the Argo bobs along unconvincingly in some cuts. Addition-



Harryhausen's Hydra puppet from *Jason and the Argonauts* in an exhibit at London's Museum of the Moving Image. The exhibit recreates the basic concept of a rear-projection set-up. The camera is in the foreground; the puppet is on an animation table (complete with holes to secure the model); and previously filmed footage of Jason (Todd Armstrong) has been projected from behind onto a translucent screen.

ally, some of the traveling mattes of the sailors looking out at Triton and the rocks are poor. Those who *want* to enjoy will engage a willing suspension of disbelief and respond to Herrmann's pounding score, the excellent miniature rocks that cascade into the sea and the silent grandeur of Triton. Others will probably sneer contemptuously.

Before the next stop-motion scene, there is a fight on board the *Argo* between Jason and Acastus (Gary Raymond), a dance in the court of King Aetes on the island of Colchis and a

scene in which Medea (Nancy Kovack) prays in the Temple of Hecate, enhanced by two reasonable matte paintings.

The seven-headed Hydra that guards the Golden Fleece is one of Harryhausen's finest models, taking full advantage of the unlimited potential of stop-motion: seven vicious, beaked heads on snake-like necks, a scaly, finned body and two tails, with the limp body of Acastus held in the coils in one of them. This is a nightmare creature that only stop-motion could bring to life. The setting is memorable: the fleece

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glimmering on a gnarled, lifeless tree beneath a cliff face, the rocks bathed in an eerie blue light, the ground shrouded in mist. Harryhausen's stamina seems to be limitless as he animates all the heads — apparently he did not chart the various directions of movement on paper but kept it all in his head.

It's a well-designed scene with some excellent composites but it's a shame that it was not developed beyond a simple battle with Jason and the Hydra's subsequent death — it's all over too quickly for such a magnificent model. Unfortunately, there are no closeups of the creature's heads — the model looks detailed enough to withstand closer scrutiny and the scene would have benefited. (The design of the heads — sloping back into horns — looks like it may have inspired the superb Verminthrax Perjorative in 1982's *Dragonslayer*.) Herrmann's score is curiously restrained and for once doesn't add much to the scene. A rubbery full-scale prop of the tail which ensnares Jason doesn't help, nor do live-action cut-away shots to Medea trying hard to look worried. But these are minor complaints.

The sequence kicks off with a good shock effect, a close shot of the seven heads lunging at the camera. In long shot, the creature slithers out of the cave on a well-matched floor inlay. The limp corpse of Acastus in one of the tails is a convincingly animated puppet. In a nice touch, the seven heads turn to look at their catch. Two dramatic dolly shots from behind the Hydra's heads move in on Jason in the rear screen. The static mattes of Jason in long shot, slashing at the seven heads snaking in and out, are excellent. Medium shots of the hissing

heads are intercut with superior traveling matte composites of Jason standing in front of the puppet.

Particularly good is a static matte in which the creature slithers in front of Jason, a miniature branch in the lower foreground enforcing the illusion. In several cuts it looks as though Harryhausen has matted around the live-action tree and fleece, thereby allowing his puppet to slither behind them; if so, it's a very intricate matte and flawlessly executed. The animation of a puppet Jason held in the Hydra's tail in three long shots is remarkably credible. Another clever composite has the live-action Jason roll away from the tail along the ground.

The Hydra rears up over Jason, who stabs it twice in its chest. In a legendary moment of camera trickery, he leaves his sword embedded in the puppet. Just what happens to the live-action sword is open to speculation. A best guess is that there never was a live-action sword: Armstrong mimed the action and Harryhausen meticulously lined up a miniature with his hand. The Hydra writhes around, screaming in pain — but by Harryhausen standards, his death screams are restrained indeed. Six cuts show it dying, one head stubbornly taking longer than all the others to expire, and the tail giving a shuddery death rattle. Subsequently, the lifeless puppet is matted into several shots of Aeetes arriving on the scene and calling down fireballs to incinerate it: "Fetch me the Hydra's teeth!"

If the Hydra sequence gives the impression that it is over too quickly, then the climactic battle with the skeletons is quite the opposite. This four-and-a-half



minute sequence is Harryhausen's masterpiece. The concept is startling, the rapid-fire editing and the enormous variety of rear-screen set-ups are breath-taking, and the animation is inspired. The pre-shot choreography of the live-actors fighting with thin air is skillfully controlled, and the interaction between puppets and actors is frequently so intimate that the illusion is totally successful. This sequence can be watched any number of times and it still amazes. Each time, it yields up new treasures, revealing the extent of Harryhausen's determination to go all out in this scene to do the best he knows how.

More crucial than the technical merits, the sequence is successful on a dramatic level as well: The balance of horror and black comedy is kept just right. Inventive touches such as the shot of the screaming skeletons charging, a skeleton getting beheaded, Jason punching another skeleton on the jaw when his sword seems to have no effect — all these insure that the audience is kept on the edge of their seats. Add to this Herrmann's adrenaline-buzzing score and you have the perfect animation scene.

Harryhausen took four and a half months to animate this episode. Sometimes he would average as few as 13 frames a day — just over half a second of film. Hardly surprising when you consider that in some cuts he was adjusting heads, arms and legs for all seven skeletons, plus any finger or jaw movements that were also required. Additionally, some composites required that the mini-



This closeup of one of the seven heads of the Hydra reveals the extraordinary detail of Harryhausen's sculpting. (Photo by John Coley.)

ature swords of the skeletons were partially cut away or extended frame-by-frame to create the illusion that they were in contact with the Argonauts. One of the skeletons — but which one? — was the same model that had been used in *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*.

The suspenseful build-up to the skeletons' appearance is brilliantly staged by Chaffey and Harryhausen. Aeetes, confronting Jason and his men among the ruins of a clifftop temple, scatters the teeth from the Hydra and calls on the "children" to appear. In a perfectly matched floor inlay, animated pieces of earth are pushed up by something below, then a sword emerges, and finally the first skeleton, pulling itself erect from a stooped position. It is joined by six others, intercut with shots of the astonished Argonauts.

For these shots, the skeleton puppets were concealed in a chamber beneath the miniature floor. One frame at a time, screws in hidden platforms beneath each skeleton were turned, raising them.

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The army of living skeletons in *Jason and the Argonauts*.

Herrmann's score is effectively silent during the tense moment when all seven skeletons stand ready, swaying slightly. "Kill! Kill! Kill them all!" bellows Aetes, and in a side view they march forward in unison. A beautifully designed "reality sandwich" shot has the three Argonauts retreating nervously in the left foreground, Aetes and his men in the background and the seven skeletons walking forward in the middle distance. In another clever perspective, Harryhausen mattes around a pillar so that as the Argonauts retreat behind one pillar on the left, the skeletons can

advance behind another pillar on the right.

With a terrifying scream, the skeletons charge, running at the camera in a superb medium shot. In a 1969 interview at Britain's National Film Theater, transcribed in *FXRH* #4, producer Charles Schneer mentioned that a shot of the skeletons charging was cut by the censor. "He felt that this was a bit too much for the younger audiences. And that came out, and it never went back, and we were satisfied that this was the only cut, even though it took two weeks of Ray's time." Is he referring to this

cut—left in by the American censor— or was there a longer cut which we have never seen?

The Argonauts jump up onto a stone pedestal and there are three long-shot static mattes in which they are attacked by all seven skeletons. There is a dizzying amount of activity in these shots with skeletons brandishing their swords, getting knocked away and Jason jumping over the sword of a skeleton who swipes at him. In these cuts, the matte not only follows the line of the floor but also goes around the head of a fallen statue, supplying a crucial foreground element that breaks up the depth of the shot. In closer shots, the vertical walls of the pedestal are miniature, allowing the skeletons to throw shadows onto the set. A nightmarish medium shot from the Argonauts' point of view has two of the skeletons grinning up at the camera. The skeletons clamber up onto the pedestal and pursue the fleeing sailors.

One skeleton chases Phalerus (Andrew Faulds) to a low wall, the matte line following the outline of a fallen pillar in the foreground which the skeleton runs behind. In a closer shot, Phalerus swings his sword and it clearly passes in front of the skeleton's shield. Again, a partial miniature sword is wire-suspended for a few frames (or painted on glass) and matched to the live one.

In another part of the ruins, the third Argonaut, Castor (Fernando Poggi), trips one of the skeletons, sending it crashing to the ground. As it gets up again, a second skeleton runs into the shot and engages the argonaut in a sword fight. This is all superb high-speed animation, reinforcing the feeling that no

matter how many of the skeletons are knocked down, there are always others ready to rush in.

Meanwhile, Jason has jumped back onto the pedestal, battling two skeletons in a cut that uses the earlier set-up with the partial miniature pedestal. In a closer shot not requiring a matte, Jason kicks one of the skeletons in the head and sends it flying. As he does so, the other skeleton jumps onto the pedestal, only to get slashed by Jason's sword and fall out of the shot. At the same moment, a third skeleton jumps up onto the pedestal.

We now cut back to Phalerus who, in a simple yet brilliant bit of interaction, ducks as a skeleton charges him and throws it over his shoulder. At the same time, a second skeleton picks itself up from the ground on the right of the shot. In a well thought-out closer shot, this skeleton tentatively circles Phalerus and crosses swords with him. This action continues in a shot from behind Phalerus as the Argonaut leans back against the wall and lifts the skeleton with his boot and sends it somersaulting clean over his head—another classic moment of interaction achieved by careful alignment.

As this skeleton is getting up, the other runs in. Phalerus leaps into the air to avoid its sword. In yet another set-up of this sequence, Phalerus climbs over the wall only to see the skeleton also leap over it, joining his fallen comrade on the other side. Almost imperceptible, that part of the wall which the skeleton jumps over is a miniature, allowing it to throw a shadow. It crosses swords with Phalerus again and there is an unforgettable closeup of the sneering skeleton,

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after which Phalerus forces the skeleton away.

We now return to Castor in the same set-up as before, in a long sequence that ends with his death. A skeleton swings its shield and knocks the Argonaut's shield away — a superbly effective suggestion of physical contact. Castor then swipes at the skeleton with his sword and sends it reeling. This is all seen in three quick cuts, where one might have sufficed — the design indicates Harryhausen's determination to make this scene special.

The two skeletons chase Castor to the ruins of a wall, vertical matte lines allowing the puppets to seem to walk behind either end of the wall. It is a brilliant touch to have a skeleton adopt a threatening half-crouch and look hungrily along both sides of the wall for his intended victim — there seems to be no end to Harryhausen's inventiveness during this sequence. Castor is now up on the wall, clashing swords with the skeletons below, and there is another point-of-view shot of the two puppets. One skeleton is knocked down and gets up again in long shot as the other looks on.

Castor jumps from this wall to another, and one of the skeletons slashes at thin air as the Argonaut leaps over him. In the next cut, the other skeleton is up on the wall and jumps after Castor, a marvelously dynamic idea that required that the puppet be suspended on wires for a few frames. Castor is now at the top of another wall with a skeleton standing on each side of the steps leading down — a memorable design. The steps on the left are part miniature. He slashes one skeleton's arm and it clutches it as though wounded. The skeleton on the

left side hacks Castor across his stomach and there is a delicious pause in the frantic pace as both skeletons watch the Argonaut fall forwards off the wall. Ingeniously, Harryhausen's animation suggests that the skeletons are *enjoying* seeing him die. This shot is an especially good composite because the actor seems to fall into the foreground past the skeletons, whose heads turn to look at him as he falls. It's a classic example of a static matte set-up fooling the eye into seeing an illusory depth.

Jason is still battling with other skeletons on the pedestal. In a long shot, he knocks one to the ground, then another, and fends off a third. In a closer shot, he beheads the second skeleton with his sword and its headless body struts around for a while, arms outstretched like a blind man. A shot of the skeleton hunting on the ground for its head was cut out after it induced chuckles from a preview audience — Harryhausen's fans would love to see this shot restored, but perhaps it was an instance of the comic aspects of the scene going too far. Even without this cut, this is still a great moment, always greeted with gasps of excited delight by audiences. (The cut leaves a slight jump in Herrmann's score.)

Phalerus battles on, kicking one skeleton away and crossing swords with another in a static matte set-up.

The next cut — with Jason engaging two skeletons on the ground in front of the pedestal — is one to treasure, containing not only the satisfying moment when he socks a skeleton in the jaw, but also two bafflingly good bits of camera trickery. Jason plunges his sword into the chest of a skeleton lying sprawled on

the ground and leaves it there. The sword begins life as a prop in the actor's hand in the live-action footage but ends up a miniature in the puppet; just how and when the switch is made remains a mystery. It's a brilliant effect and a candidate for best-ever effect in a Harryhausen film.

Equally baffling is the quick moment when the second skeleton runs into the shot and its sword passes *behind* Jason. One way of achieving this would be to have hand-drawn mattes roto-scoped for each frame, their outline following Jason's moving body. But as far as is known, Harryhausen used this technique only once, during the flood sequence in *Clash of the Titans*. It seems more likely that he used a series of partial miniature swords, lining each up so that they ended where the actor's outline began in the rear screen. As the sword is lowered by the skeleton, more of it disappears behind the actor, then it reappears as the sword goes lower still. It is astonishing that Harryhausen should go to such lengths to improve the look of a shot; he could so easily have just had his puppet hold the sword clear of the actor's body.

In four dramatic long shots, Jason is chased to the edge of the cliff by three skeletons. The invisible matte line runs through the irregular rocky terrain. As in the whole of this scene, the electric variety of the choreography never lets up: Jason knocks the skeletons away with his sword, in a desperate bid throws his shield at them, then repulses another with his spear.

Phalerus' death scene also contains moments of dazzling interaction between puppet and actor. He is trapped

against a wall by two skeletons. The sword of one of them passes behind the actor on two occasions and when Phalerus strikes at a skeleton's shield, a partial miniature sword is introduced to the shot so that it appears to be in front of the shield. In a celebrated effect, a skeleton plunges his sword deep into Phalerus' chest, the miniature sword being whittled away frame by frame to suggest it is piercing the actor. The puppet advances a step, really shoving the sword in, and a nightmarish medium shot of the grinning skeleton suggests that it is thoroughly enjoying itself. One skeleton runs out of the shot as Phalerus falls forward. Because the actor falls across the matte line, the second skeleton is able to seem to jump over his corpse as it follows its comrade.

There are four final stop-motion cuts at the cliff-top. A medium shot of Jason forcing back three skeletons with his spear is followed by a long shot showing the puppets falling in a heap — a tricky bit of animation made to look easy. To his dismay, Jason sees three more skeletons running at him from the temple (one of them is supported on wires for a few frames as it leaps down from the stone pedestal). As a last gesture of defiance, Jason hurls his spear at the clattering horde, turns and jumps off the edge of the cliff. The relentless skeletons follow him and perish in the sea below. In this final cut, the cliff face is miniature, and the actor actually jumps onto a mattress hidden by an area of live-action sea matted into the right hand corner of the set-up.

*Jason and the Argonauts* is a milestone film and its skeleton scene ranks as one of the most exquisitely designed and

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executed sequences in any fantasy film. Yet the two years it took to make and the \$3.5 million it cost failed to get the response it deserved at the box office. A flood of brainless Italian muscleman epics had just reached cinema screens at the same time as *Jason's* release, and audiences just assumed that Harryhausen's

film was one of them. It did much better business in Britain (which had less exposure to the Italian films), and became one of that country's big money-makers of the year. On television and in revival cinemas all over the world, it is a perennial favorite, possessing a timeless appeal that delights young and old alike.

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## *Jaws 3-D*

1983. Alan Landsburg Productions. D: Joe Alves. Scr: Richard Matheson, Carl Gottlieb. Story: Guerdon Trueblood. Suggested by the Novel "Jaws" by Peter Benchley. Ph: James A. Contner. Filmed in Arrivision 3-D. Art: Woods Mackintosh. Mus: Alan Parker. "Jaws" Theme by John Williams. Special Visual Effects: Robert Blalack, Praxis Film Works, Private Stock Effects.

Cast: Dennis Quaid, Bess Armstrong, Simon MacCorkindale, Louis Gossett, Jr., John Putsch, Lea Thompson.

Rating: ☆☆½ Stop-Motion: ☆☆

Steven Spielberg's original 1975 film was a classic thriller, but the series predictably weakened with each entry. The director of this third entry was Joe Alves, the mechanical effects supervisor of the first two films, and he is unable to generate the excitement and menace which are crucial. Characterization — so memorable in the original — is feebly stereotypical. Worst offenders are the British underwater photographer (Simon MacCorkindale) and his assistant. But the film does contain one memorable shark attack, in which MacCorkindale is swallowed whole. An unsettling shot

from inside the shark's mouth shows MacCorkindale struggling to get out, only to be followed by the sound of teeth crunching against bone.

There is a lot of substandard blue-screen work, probably caused by the extra problems of shooting in 3-D. In one shot, a miniature mini-sub has been so carelessly composited with a model of the underwater theme park that it is possible to see clean through it. In a climactic shot of the giant shark swimming straight towards the camera and smashing through the glass window of the underwater control center, the shark miniature is held so immobile that it looks embarrassingly fake.

Most shots of the 30-foot shark use either live-action footage of a normal-sized shark or an unwieldy full-size prop. In an attempt to avoid this unwieldiness, one shot makes use of stop-motion. The shark has rammed its head into the control center and is trying to force itself further in to get at the people inside. In a long shot filmed entirely in miniature, an armatured puppet of the shark is stop-framed, its tail swishing

# The Stop-Motion Filmography

*A Critical Guide to 297 Features  
Using Puppet Animation*

NEIL PETTIGREW

WITH A FOREWORD BY  
Ray Harryhausen



McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers  
*Jefferson, North Carolina, and London*

Frontispiece: *King Kong* (1933), conceived by Merian C. Cooper and brought to life by Willis O'Brien, is still the yardstick against which all stop-motion characters must be measured.

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